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The Honorable John Dingell
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Dingell,

Thank you for the opportunity to review your legislation, The Imported Food Safety Act of 1998. It has been a pleasure to work with your staff, John Ford, on this and other food safety issues. We applaud your interest and attention to important food safety issues.

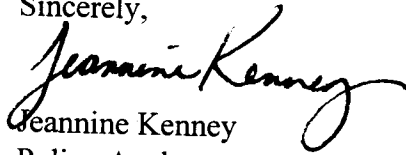
From our initial review, the bill appears to address several concerns related to the inadequate import safeguards that fail to ensure a safe food supply – notably, the infrequency of inspection and the insufficiency of Food and Drug Administration enforcement authorities. The new revenues and authorities provided in your legislation is an important step toward addressing inspection and enforcement concerns regarding imports and providing for increased research for improved microbial testing. Consumers Union supported the increased funding requested in the President's Food Safety Initiative, in part, because of the increased resources that would be provided for import inspection. We are concerned that Congressional appropriators did not provide this vital funding, particularly in light of the recent GAO report, Food Safety - Federal Efforts to Ensure the Safety of the Food Supply Are Inconsistent and Unreliable.

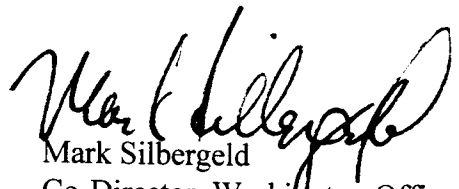
In particular, CU supports the strong authority provided to FDA to determine that an importing country's food safety and pesticide approval and monitoring programs afford consumers the same level of protection as our domestic food safety and pesticide programs. However, we believe our the U.S. domestic food safety system and pesticide programs must also be enhanced to improve the safety of our domestic food supply.

We are also pleased that your legislation addresses import concerns regarding both microbial contamination and pesticide residues. As you may know, Consumers Union has long been committed to reducing risk from and exposure to pesticides in both the imported and domestic food supply.

As Consumers Union continues to evaluate the legislation, we look forward to working with you and your staff to enhance the effectiveness of the bill's import provisions and to address shortcomings in the safety of the domestic food safety system. The Imported Food Safety Act is a strong first step toward a safer food supply for all Americans.

Sincerely,


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